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UNCLAS SECTION 01 OF 02 BEIJING 001928

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SUBJECT: CHINESE INTERNET REACTION TO XINJIANG UNREST

Summary

¶1. The recent riots and ethnic tensions in Xinjiang were hot topics on major Chinese news portals, Internet forums and microblogging platforms in China over the past few days. Widespread censorship was present on popular social discussion platforms. Many netizens expressed skepticism about available reporting on the riots and were frustrated by online censorship of the issue. Initial netizen reactions on both traditionally liberal and conservative sites expressed anger toward unequal and preferential treatment of minorities. Many netizens called for equal punishment of all involved in the violence, regardless of ethnicity. A survey of major Chinese websites on July 8 revealed that netizen postings on mainstream or conservative sites tended to echo government statements, with many postings suggesting outside influence (e.g. Rabiya Kadeer) in instigating the unrest. End Summary.

Popular Discussion Platforms Widely Censored

¶2. The recent unrest and riots in Xinjiang were widely discussed topics on the Chinese Internet beginning on July 6. However, access to searches about Xinjiang, Uighurs, Urumqi, and violence were blocked on many Chinese language searches or in some cases, available results did not include sensitive material. Websites Fanfou.com, the Chinese version of Twitter, Facebook and Youtube, were completely blocked. Comments and threads about the recent riots were deleted from both liberal and conservative websites including PChome, Qiangguo, Sina, and Cat898. Netizens expressed frustration over deleted postings sometimes threatening those responsible for deleting posts. However, accessible sites, blogs, microblogging platforms, and discussion forums nonetheless had a high volume of postings related to Xinjiang. Photos and video clips were widely reposted and linked, especially on Twitter.

Skepticism of Government's Version of Xinjiang Unrest

¶3. Netizens on traditionally liberal websites were generally unconvinced by government reports, which many described as "too simple." Many demanded more information that was "unbiased" and "not one-sided," no matter who was implicated. Calls also continued for more information about the identity of those killed.

Netizen Reaction to Preferential Policies and Violence

¶4. On traditionally liberal sites like Twitter and Cat898, many netizens posted angry criticism of what they characterized as the Chinese government's preferential treatment of Uighurs, often making critical remarks about minority exemptions to the one child policy or automatic score increases granted to ethnic minorities on national college entrance exams. Popular comments that attracted numerous hits included: "one can't be lenient just because they are minorities" and "regardless of what race they are, all should be

treated the same." Some postings turned into on-line debates about how to deal with ethnic prejudice featuring proposals to weaken ethnic minority identity to removing ethnic designations from identity cards. Others equated minority problems to the government's inability to overcome income disparity. Tension between Han Chinese and Uighurs was also widely present in forums, including characterizations of all Uighurs as "separatist terrorists," criticisms of Islam and assertions of Han Chinese superiority. One netizen warned that "policies to pacify minorities would lead to deaths."

¶15. Netizens were also upset about the violence and expressed concern that the violence had "caused enormous problems" for social stability. Many popular posts called for "severe punishment" for those that had committed violence, regardless of whether they were Uighurs or Han Chinese.

#### Comparisons to Tibet Unrest

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¶16. Comparisons of the Xinjiang unrest and the March 14, 2008 violent Tibet protests were widespread. Some saw the handling of the situation in Xinjiang as a failure to learn from China's mistakes with the Tibet riots. On the other hand, some described Rabiya Kadeer and the Dalai Lama as equivalent "Western-backed splittist terrorists" or labeled Kadeer "China's Bin Laden" who had "severely harmed the country." On traditionally conservative websites, the United States and western countries were criticized for being "black hands" or the "outside forces" causing the unrest. However, calls to "learn from the U.S. experience with racism" were also present, along with discussion about how democracy had helped resolve "America's greatest contradiction." Many questions and

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posts queried why other countries with various different races did not have these tensions.

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